

Peeling away Police Report

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Cllr **Alex Coley** (RA Ruxley) is Chair of the borough's Crime & Disorder committee and Epsom & Ewell's representative on the Surrey Police & Crime Panel, which holds the Police and Crime Commissioner to account. He writes for the Epsom and Ewell Times on an HM Inspector's report on Surrey Police.

At the beginning of December, Surrey Police released the latest report from His Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary. This is known as a PEEL assessment, which stands for police efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy.

It is disappointing to see the overall deterioration in a number of areas since the last report two years ago. Surrey Police is no longer Outstanding in any areas, while areas that were assessed as Good have slipped to Adequate or Requires Improvement.



Cllr. Alex Coley

Residents have frequently told me how unhappy they are about problems trying to contact Surrey Police. 'Responding to the public' is now graded as Inadequate in the latest inspection, the lowest rating possible. First contact is paramount, so I am encouraged that a Chief Superintendent has now been appointed to oversee the contact centre, but this will need to be watched closely to turn things around.

The PEEL assessment also shows that Surrey Police is failing to record sexual offences effectively; a serious issue for the flagship priority of preventing Violence Against Women and Girls. Furthermore, when victims report antisocial behaviour, the force is failing to record most crime and to tackle ASB effectively. This has led to a rating of Requires Improvement for 'Recording data about crime'.

The inspection also shows that 'Building, supporting and protecting the workforce' now Requires Improvement in Surrey. Policing is a tough job, with lots of pressure. If the wellbeing of police officers and staff isn't looked after it's no surprise this affects performance. The attrition rate for new police officers reflects this assessment rating, with 32% leaving in the first two years.

I have met with the new Chief Constable twice and had the opportunity to ask about his plans for Surrey Police. I have found him to be candid and convincing about the changes that need to happen. He has appraised the situation as a question of leadership. I believe we need to prioritise putting residents first and fighting crime. It's what we pay our taxes for.

I remain less convinced about the repeated underspend in the Surrey Police Group budget and will continue to raise this with the Police & Crime Commissioner. While I appreciate the desire for resilient reserves, I do not feel it can be justified to squirrel away £43m into treasury management while performance deteriorates. The PCC is directly responsible for financial reserves and the police precept collected from your council tax.

Source: <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/peel-assessments/peel-assessments-2023-25/surrey/>

Top image: Surrey Police vehicles in the Epsom and Ewell Town Hall car park. Google.